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Research Article

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“Wozu Image?” / What’s the Point of Images? Exploring the Relation between Image and Text through Intersemiotic Translation and Its Embodied Experience.

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Abstract: “Wozu Image?” is a two-hour workshop held as part of “(e)motion,” the second Cultural Literacy in Europe (CLE) Biennial Conference which took place in Warsaw on May 10–12, 2017. In our session, we expanded the themes of the “Wozu Poesie?” exhibition, first held in Berlin in 2013, which, with thanks to *Haus für Poesie* (formerly *Literatur Werkstatt Berlin*), was shown as part of the conference. The workshop explored, through intersemiotic translation and its embodied experience, the relation between image and text, and what it means to put oneself in the picture. In this paper, we contextualise this *artivism*, or *metaphorical* “act of war,” in relation to photography. Artivism is a composite word that denotes “an activist action directed to creating change through the medium and resources of art” (Poposki 718). We report and record the processes and outcomes of the workshop with the aim of opening up intersemiotic translation (translation as encounter and experience across different media) to explorations beyond words and across disciplines. Specifically, we explore the production of text in relation to images as a way of thinking through a problem and answering questions, and the composition of an image as a way to embody thoughts on cultural literacy.

Keywords: self-portraiture, intersemiotic translation, embodiment, photography

“Wozu Poesie?”

“Wozu Poesie?” or “What’s the Point of Poetry?” is a project conceived and executed by Minsk-based conceptual artist Sergey Shabohin within a photo-aesthetic framework that aimed to place poetry, society and homeland in relation with each other. Commissioned in 2012 by Thomas Wohlfahrt, Director of *Haus für Poesie*, this activist exhibition engaged with 47 poets from 47 member or candidate countries of the Council of Europe, inviting them to stage and photograph their responses in a public space, following standard technical guidelines for capturing the resulting image. For Shabohin, these highly individual self-portraits of poets wearing red balaclavas and holding poems scratched out on pieces of cardboard represented an “art-terrorist gesture,” which “symbolised the state of affairs for artists in modern societies,” as reported by Olga Shparaga (Shabohin 6). In his foreword to the exhibition catalogue, Wohlfahrt explained that the exhibition aimed “to initiate a Europe-wide discussion on the self-perception of this art and its artists in social realities” (Shabohin 4). The poets’ gestures, distributed in time and space across Europe and brought

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together digitally to travel further, inevitably challenge notions of boundaries—spatial, temporal, social, cultural, sexual—and form a natural segue into the theme of “(e)motion,” the second biennial conference of the Cultural Literacy in Europe (CLE) forum held in Warsaw in May 2017.

Intrigued by the potential of individual images from “Wozu Poesie?” to foster interaction and dialogue, and also to spark locally inspired activist offshoots, we invited the exhibition, structured to travel cost-effectively after its premiere in Berlin, to be shown in Warsaw during the event. Building on the intersemiotic dimension of the images in “Wozu Poesie?” through the medium of words, body and photography, “Wozu Image?” returns the gaze onto the image and could be said to hold up a mirror to the question posed by “Wozu Poesie?.” Olga Shparaga notes that the answers in “Wozu Poesie?” depend on “how the language, for which the poet is considered a means of subsistence (Brodsky), is still seen today as the ‘house of being’ (Heidegger)” and asks: “Who lives in this house and in what way; who or what stands outside of its borders?” (6). The present workshop set out to translate “Wozu Poesie?” in an embodied way, posing participants the challenge that the poets and image-makers of the original compositions faced, whereby the “house” has shifted from language to body, as reflected in each participant’s reflexive process: who/what lives in this body, what are its borders? How does this body relate to place? Through the medium of the self-portrait, the participants’ answers offered an embodied expression beyond the purely verbal, not confined to one or the other (text or image) but operating across sensory modalities.

“Wozu Image?”: Aims, Participants and Context

The workshop took place as part of the CLE Conference “(e)motion.” This, of course, posed a particular set of constraints with regards to who the participants would be. The context in which “Wozu Image?” took place drew academics from literary, cultural, visual literacy, or educational areas of expertise. Attendees were also interested in art, but would not define themselves as artists. Participants elected to attend this workshop from a menu of sessions. They came from a common, European socio-economic and cultural background (mostly Caucasian and able-bodied) and were, for the most part, visiting Warsaw for the conference. The fact that they did not identify as artists fitted the target participant profile for the workshop and they readily provided informed consent for their process to be observed, recorded and utilised for further research.

The aim of the workshop was to show the complexities of image making, especially in relation to taking images of the self. Apart from the learning that occurred in the workshop itself, we considered that participants could apply the ideas, techniques and decision making processes of the workshop in the context of taking images of themselves, placed, staged, saying something or answering a question (whether explicitly or not is not important). We wanted to show how placing oneself in the picture is in itself a political act, and an important consideration when photograph-taking facilities are widely available to the particular demographic group we targeted with this workshop. We also wanted participants to make sense of a place through photography— in terms of their sensory relation to the walls, stairs, masonry or people around them—but also in the geopolitical sense of the conference taking place in the city’s Staszic Palace, which was refashioned as a Russo-Byzantine monument after the partition of Poland, and since restored to its original neoclassical features. Several participants explored the building itself, now home to the Polish Academy of Science. Others chose to take their self-portraits outside in the square, mounting the steps that lead to the statue of Copernicus, or photographing their reflection in a window sporting luxury goods on the Nowy Świat, the city’s vibrant shopping artery, which was rebuilt like much of the city in the 1950s after its destruction by Nazi Germany following the 1944 Warsaw uprising.

In addition, given the specific academic areas that made up the skillset and expertise of the participant group, they could use the embodied experience of image making in their critique of images, which some participants were engaged in as part of their research and teaching work. In doing so they were introduced to the perspective of CLE’s London Statement on “cultural literacy,” “an attitude to the social and cultural phenomena that shape and fill our existence—bodies of knowledge, fields of social action, individuals or groups, and, of course cultural artefacts, including texts—which views them as being essentially *readable*” (Segal 3, emphasis in original).

“Wozu Image?” was devised and led by us, Madeleine Campbell and Laura González, academics and researchers. In addition, we both engage in creative work, although not directly activism. González is a visual artist and performance maker who has written several publications. In her work, she translates the case histories of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud into durational one-to-one performances. These pieces are at the interface between image and text. She also teaches performance making, writing and embodied practices (such as yoga). Her interest in devising this workshop was to explore different strategies participants would employ to construct imagetexts, which differs from her own work, where the starting point is a text that gets turned into an image. In “Wozu Image,” the translation process was made manifest.

Madeleine’s research interests are concerned with the nature of intersemiotic translation, which she has examined through collaborative art-making projects (for example the “Jetties” project, Campbell; Campbell, et al.). In the context of the research agenda elaborated through CLE’s Intersemiotic Special Interest Group (SIG) on Intersemiotic Translation and Cultural Literacy, research questions informing this workshop included: to what extent can non-verbal media and modalities contribute to shaping an alternative perspective in the context of hegemonic cultural practices? How does growing cultural fragmentation (social, geopolitical, post-humanist) contribute to blurring the borders between aesthetically-driven notions of product and process, spectator and practitioner? To what extent is the viewer or audience a co-creator in this process? How does an intersemiotically translated artefact differ from one delivered within the same sign system as its source? To what extent can its position in time and space be said to be fixed or fluid? What role can intersemiotic translation practice play in developing a renewed sense of self, or place? What essential body of knowledge should be brought to the process of understanding intersemiotic practice?

While not explicitly posed to the participants, these questions helped to advance the Intersemiotic SIG’s broader research project: they were helpful both in guiding the workshop structure and in clarifying priorities post-workshop for the next phase of research, in which practising artists were to be invited to contribute examples, subjective accounts and theoretical perspectives of their intersemiotic practice. The latter contributions, assembled in a volume to be published in 2019, have suggested a diverse interdisciplinary framework spanning semiotics, cognitive poetics, psychoanalysis and transformative learning. Continuity between the “Wozu Image?” workshop and subsequent research was afforded by the phenomenological approach and broadly interpretivist epistemology brought to bear on this long-term, practice-led project of enquiry (Campbell & Vidal); this specific workshop’s emphasis on *reading* activism is consistent with a deconstructionist, aporetic “post theory” wherein concepts of art and aesthetics cannot be read or held as separate from sociopolitical engagement (Lather 37).

Our respective positionalities as researchers in visual and performing arts and in intersemiotic translation with a focus on cultural literacy are subjective and embodied. We engaged as both observer and participant in the experiential process of the workshop in order to further explore the role of the imagetext, one combination among many possible combinations across modalities and media, in translating a given series of artefacts (“Wozu Poesie?”) into another (“Wozu Image?”).

Embodiment through Photographs

What’s the point of this workshop’s exercise? Why make participants embody an exhibition and take photographs rather than, perhaps, discuss it, offer theoretical frameworks or contextualise it? Why end up with an image? After all, as Roland Barthes writes:

According to an ancient etymology, the word *image* should be linked to the word *imitari*. Thus we find ourselves immediately at the heart of the most important problem facing the semiology of images: can analogical representation (the ‘copy’) produce true systems of signs and not merely simple agglutinations of symbols? (Barthes 269)

Furthermore, the image to be produced is not just any image—a painting, a drawing, a mental image—but a photograph. Much has been written about how the advent of photography changed how we see, understand and engage with the world. And to this historical view of the emergence of photography can be added its subsequent ubiquity in the form of camera phones.

As Susan Sontag wrote, photographs are pieces of the world, more than statements about it. They certify experience, but also resist engaging with it directly; they limit experience by converting it into an image (9). Photography has resistance embedded in its process. Photographs make us see but, in that process, they demand that we surrender to the product: “To attempt to improve one’s power of observation by looking through a lens, one must renounce the attempt to achieve knowledge by means of other senses or from hearsay” (Foucault 145). For Jean Baudrillard, “Photography produces a kind of thunderstruck effect, a form of suspense and phenomenal immobility which interrupts the precipitation of events” (134). Added to this is the fact that “Wozu Image?” asked participants to engage with a specific type of photograph: the self-portrait. Self-portraiture is seemingly a private practice but with relevance to a public audience. A great number of assumptions are made about it, especially the self-portrait taken through the medium of photography, which is commonplace in social media. Angela Kelly writes that it tends to be associated with self-indulgence, vanity, and narcissism, yet rarely with self-awareness (410-16). It is perceived to be the expression of the photographer-model’s unique vision, but the fact that self-portraits are a part of a collective experience we all share is rarely examined. Self-portraits purport to reveal the inner character of the subject, as opposed to just a likeness.

We chose to engage with “Wozu Poesie?” and re-enact its method of composing images because of the qualities that photography and self-portraiture offer: photography stops, resists events from being experienced or happening, demands surrender; self-portraiture can show the inside (Nuñez; Kozinets et al.). Together, they facilitate a reflexive mode of analysis, enabling the breaking of the fascination with the mirror (reflection), giving distance from one’s engulfing self-image (Nixon 68). Mignon Nixon elaborates on the power of the lens and the body to facilitate the journey from *reflective* (to do with thought) to *reflexive* (self-referring), which is also what psychoanalytic practice does:

By contrast [with performance], video performance, centered on the body of the performer before the camera, produces the effect of a ‘collapsed present’ equivalent to the space-time of mirror reflection, or the patient on the couch—the very task of analysis being to convert the ‘fascination with the mirror’, or reflective mode, into a reflexive one. ‘The analytic project’, Krauss observes, is one in which ‘the patient disengages from ... his reflected self, and through a method of reflexivity, rediscovers the real time of his own history. He exchanges the atemporality of repetition for the temporality of change.’ In short, psychoanalysis is not a confessional mode, in which self-image is nurtured, but a gradual process of alienation from the sovereign self (70).

Both reflection and reflexion are embodied, but the former is an engulfing mode of embodiment. Roland Barthes described engulfment as “[an] outburst of annihilation which affects the ... subject in despair or fulfillment ... a moment of hypnosis” (Barthes 10-11). In order to raise the consciousness of what images can do, we wanted to avoid this hypnosis of the self-image. The move from reflective to reflexive is embedded in the aim of the workshop, as we wanted to achieve a balance between thinking through (or an intellectual response to) the problem of an image, especially one of the self, with embodiment and self-reference, putting the image-makers into the picture. While thought in itself is not problematic, it is not the only possible source of knowledge production. Instead, we sought a state of self-reflexivity, which, according to Robert Samuels, is “a mode of resistance” (6). Psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche also refers to this phenomenon—especially in the analytic setting—when he writes, “external alterity refers back to internal alterity” (Laplanche 224). The “fascination with the mirror” in the above quote by Nixon is a reference to Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage, the developmental phase in which children realise they are the person reflected in the mirror, which marks them forever (Lacan; Nobus; Benvenuto and Kennedy). The image in the mirror offers the child a coherent image of the self and brings about the creation of the ego as an agency. This reflection fixes the self as a fundamental ontological experience, explaining human fascination with images in general. In the mirror stage, the image constitutes the child, rather than the other way around.

In “Wozu Image?” we worked with this reflexive quality. Participants had to be attentive to, and comprehend, visual and auditory stimuli (the word- and image-prompts) to be able to translate “Wozu Poesie?” into “Wozu Image?.” Reversibility, awareness of other agents and personal freedom were inherent in the use of the self and the staging of the images, whether alone or in groups. The exercise of these capacities led to self-consciousness (the ability to ascribe experiences to oneself), which is a precursor to

self-reflexivity, as described by British philosopher Paul Crowther. Self-consciousness and self-reflexivity in “Wozu Image?” were evidenced by the sharing part of the workshop, where all images produced were revealed and discussed. Participants expressed experiential knowledge acquired through the task and, by means of exploring their image-taking in the building or outside, were aware of themselves in context, in reflexivity. We especially devised the workshop to raise awareness of the role and responsibility of the self when one engages in image criticism. Even if not literally present in the image, a critic is a subjective actor, already *in the picture*, even if only metaphorically. In a way, it is *Photocriticism* in the manner of Jo Spence’s *Phototherapy*, using photography as therapy: the body, in Spence the ailing female body, is always in the foreground but it is also situated in a place, sometimes expected (a bed, a hospital) sometimes unexpected (in front of a brick wall, in a street). Our participants produced textual signs and sited them in and around the building we found ourselves in and most chose to display their bodies in action, thereby offering an embodied response to the question “What’s the point of images?.”

What they produced is complex to decode, yet informative, in the way criticism is. Photography operates through a mechanism that does not represent criticism but embodies it; criticism is made present. Kaja Silverman explains this phenomenon of making present through an analysis of photography and Lacan’s mimicry. “When [mimicry] happens, the subject does not simply hold up the imaginary photograph in front of him or her, but approximates or attempts to approximate its form” (Silverman 201). Mimicry, she argues, should be taken as a given; its agency needs to be mastered and, in photography, this is by no means easy, as the imaginary, that mirror image of Lacan, will always *photograph* us, in a way, before the actual photograph is taken. Photography makes that sense of self manifest, rather than creates it but, in making it manifest, allows us to look at it, reflexively. As John Berger writes:

There is no transforming in photography. There is only decision, only focus. The minimal message of a photograph may be less simple than we first thought. Instead of being: *I have decided that seeing this is worth recording*, we may now decode it as: *The degree to which I believe this is worth looking at can be judged by all that I am willingly not showing because it is contained within it.* (Berger 294, emphasis in original)

The examples shown to the workshop participants and discussed below, helped to establish a methodology to be self-aware, self-reflexive and critical, while creating image and text self-portraits that *willingly did not show* what they contained within. The “Wozu Poesie?” images along with works by Gillian Wearing and La Ribot were employed in this process.

Image and Text

The broad field of text and image interactions includes imagetexts of several types, showing different artistic methodologies that combine these elements. The workshop could be contextualised in relation to a variety of artistic and poetic practices exploring these image and text relations. During the event, this context had to be limited for reasons of time and focus, as the works of the selected artists were intended to offer direct inspiration. The specific notion of imagetext, as distinguished from the ekphrastic encounter, contains a wide variety of sources worth mentioning here, from the field of visual poetry—for example, Ian Hamilton Finlay and other more contemporary “vispo” and concrete poets—and visual artists who are known for using text in, or as, their artworks, for example Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger or Bruce Nauman. In the practices of these artists text becomes image or image is also text.

The particular type of imagetexts that “Wozu Image?” generated in the workshop were, however, modelled more closely on examples of work from Gillian Wearing and La Ribot, as they included text, and the body, within the image. The work of these two key artists was introduced in the workshop to provide a contrast to, and enrich the themes of, “Wozu Poesie?.” First, British artist Gillian Wearing’s 1992-3 *Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say* is a series of photographs depicting subjects holding the hand-written signs alluded to in the title. The sign held up by a police officer (for he is dressed in his uniform) reads the caption “Help,” a young man’s “I’m desperate” (Tate). Wearing’s work gives permission for the image and text to enter into a discordant relation with each

other, to not be coherent and seamless but to engage the viewer in a process of decoding and meaning-making. In addition, the result is emotive, sometimes a cry for help, sometimes the articulation of something that should have remained hidden (“I have been certified as mildly insane”).

La Ribot's *Laughing Hole* is a performance work, which took place at Art Basel 37 in 2006. In this six-hour-long durational work (work where time is manifested in its original and natural form and made central to the experience of the performers and the viewers), La Ribot and two other performers, dressed in cleaners' pinnies, walk around a space where the floor is littered with cardboard placards, face down. They pick one at random and lift it showing it around while laughing hysterically before walking to a wall and pinning it with tape. The text written on the placards is controversial, a reminder of tabloid headlines with residues of the violent conflicts around the world today: “die here,” “brutal hole,” “this is impotent.” Are these the remainders of a protest? The effect is one of disjunction between image and text, of a situation in which the text and the moving image should not be together. The audience is clearly wavering about which one they should follow. Should they laugh with the performers in therapeutic catharsis or ponder the open meanings of the words? Like Wearing's work, *Laughing Hole* shows how language operates in our bodies, how it gets to us and how the act of reading (images, actions, texts) is political.

Both Wearing's and La Ribot's work shown in the “Wozu Image?” workshop can be seen as examples of intersemiotic translation.

Intersemiotic Translation and the Relation between Image and Text

Linguist Roman Jakobson defined intersemiotic translation as: “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (233). Taking Jakobson's seminal definition of this concept as point of departure, the SIG on Intersemiotic Translation aims to explore the process, rather than product, of intersemiotic translation as it “carries a source text (or artefact) across sign systems and typically creates connections between different cultures and media” (Cultural Literacy in Europe). Recognising that it is both a simultaneous and a multi-dimensional process that occurs on many levels and through the medium of all the senses, we choose to focus here on the relation between image and text as just one dynamic element in the complex web of interactions that makes up an intersemiotic translation event. We also posit that taking into account the multi-sensory, rather than purely verbal, nature of human beings and their psyche, brings additional dimensions to the challenges of equivalence in linguistic translation (Benjamin; Deleuze; Derrida). When seeking to “equate” the creative process of the source artefact, the multiple modalities of human impression (what we “see” with our senses) can give rise to diverse and unique individual expression, embracing the role of the self and its perennial construction in the act of translation.

Similarly, we choose to focus on the transience of poetic expression and human affect, rather than on source and target, in exploring individual creative journeys from text to image and image to text. In this respect, in creating a frame for the “Wozu Image?” workshop, we contextualised our enquiry with reference to how different poets have related to image, and how image-makers have related to words and texts. Literary criticism is familiar with the ekphrastic encounter, where a poet or prose writer, entranced by an image, usually a painting, is moved to create a textual artefact that evokes the image in some way (although this might not be literal or descriptive). This type of creative encounter is typically a unidirectional experience, in which the object of the encounter is mute and its author removed in time and space. While John Ashbery's poem “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,” addressing Parmigianino's eponymous self-portrait in 1524, foregrounds the surface features of the artwork, the recent compilation of stories and essays written by Robert Walser between 1918 and 1930 and translated in *Looking at Pictures*, tends to build short prose narratives loosely based on the figures portrayed in Pieter Brueghel the Younger's *The Parable of the Blind* (c 1616) or Vincent van Gogh's 1888-9 *L'Arlésienne* and to weave these through with autobiographical digressions.

In contrast, the photo/graphic image in “Wozu Poesie?” and “Wozu Image?,” in which image and text are equally embedded, can be considered in the manner of W. J. T. Mitchell as an “image-text,” which

designates “composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text” (89). In the visual examples we introduced at the workshop, by Gillian Wearing and La Ribot, there is friction between text and image (whether this is a photograph or a performance). Here, the encounter is not ekphrastic. The image aims to encourage the viewer to reconsider the words, and vice-versa. For example, the portrait of the police officer holding a sign reading “Help” might suggest the meaning that this is what the officer is offering and also what he might be seeking, from the reader and viewer. In La Ribot’s *Laughing Hole*, the friction stems from the bodily reaction of laughter that a two or three-word combination (“do not buy,” “impotent mum” or “alien brutality”) provokes. When one learns the provenance of the words, the friction between words and image is heightened further:

The piece’s laughter is also a gesture of dissent towards the dehumanizing verbal imagery of the mass media. Echoing the brutality of tabloid headlines, *Laughing Hole*’s texts protest not just Western abuses of human rights, but the manner in which the media presents them to the citizens in whose names they’ve been perpetrated. (La Ribot, n.p.)

In both of these visual examples, text and image enter a dialogue and take the viewer/reader through a translation that is not stable but fluid, flexible, multi-sensory, non-verbal, and thus, intersemiotic.

In addition to the dissonances outlined above, much has been written in different genres about the relation between image and text, where the *image* a word or text evokes may or may not be conspecific with its *referent*. A brief overview of the latter also served as a springboard for workshop participants, who would not necessarily describe themselves as image-makers or text-makers, to produce their own *forme brève* (short literary form) in the brief time allocated. Looking at aphorisms by Edmond Jabès and René Magritte, we explored how words and image can be brought into relation when writing on the page and also when composing an image (see Figure 7: Workshop Handout at the end of this paper).

We considered, for example, how the reversals of figure and ground in surrealist images can “involve a literalisation of metaphor” (Stockwell 17), and thereby take the notion of metaphor beyond the confines of language, both in image and in poetry. Another perspective on the translation of metaphor from image to text was brought to bear from Ezra Pound’s imagist poetry, where the image metaphor, rather than being conceptual, carries its own “mappings from one sensory domain to another” (Crisp 103). In the following poem, for example, the image of “faces” is mapped onto the image of “petals”—and remains in the experiential realm:

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.
(Pound 12)

We also considered referents that carry a strong symbolic as well as visual valence, taking as example Gertrude Stein’s 1931 paratactic flights on the vocable “rose.” Her verses evoke successive metonymies associated with this image-symbol from mediaeval times to the present day, from *Le Roman de la rose*, itself rooted in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, through Shakespeare’s “that which we call a rose/by any other name would smell as sweet” (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act II. Scene II, lines 47-48). Another perspective was exemplified in Umberto Eco’s latter-day semiotic foray into the arcane world of medieval theology in *The Name of the Rose*, which explored the complex intertextual links associated with the evolution of this word in different periods and contexts.

Process and Outcome: Writing, Sign-making, Staging, Photographing

Before the workshop, participants had been asked to see as much of the “Wozu Poesie?” exhibition as possible and to bring a red item into the workshop. If they had access to a mobile phone with a camera and writing materials, they were also asked to bring those. We provided paper, pens and markers, cardboard

boxes, scissors, tape, a red scarf, a tripod and a camera phone. At the beginning of the workshop, before the practical task of constructing individual images, we held a discussion on what the main themes of “Wozu Poesie?” were for the eleven participants, as a way of contextualising the exhibition and outlining the methods for creation. We asked them what they saw in “Wozu Poesie?” images. Their responses focused on place, value, politics, and communication of ideas, all of which set the scene for exploring the practical steps of writing, sign-making, staging and photographing.

The task for the present workshop was then introduced. The quotes in the Workshop Handout (Figure 7) were used as prompts to discuss the relation between word, image and referent, leading to the central question of the workshop: “What’s the point of images in intersemiotic translation?” Participants were then asked to write a stream-of-consciousness series of 6 to 10 lines until they reached a point of equilibrium where they felt they had found a word or combination of words that both addressed the question and could be embodied in an image of their own construction (see Figure 1).

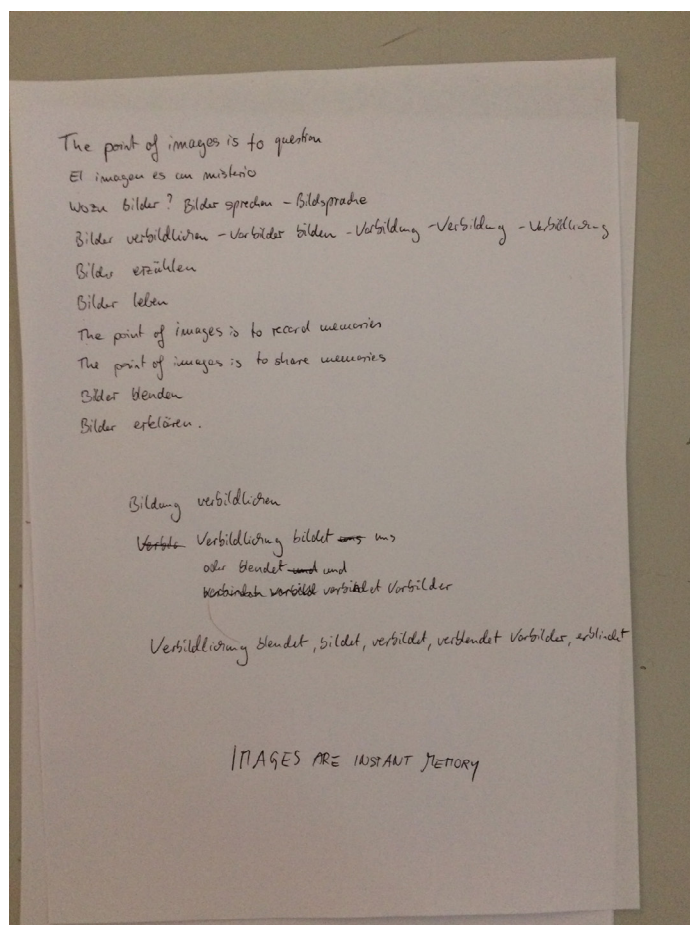


Figure 1. First stage: brainstorming answers

Participants were then asked to replicate some of the methods in “Wozu Poesie?” (the placards, the red item) when answering the new question. We gave consideration to visual strategies such as *tableaux vivants* [living pictures], self-portraits and activism as methods to employ in constructing the images, as these pay particular attention to decision-making, gesture, voice, frame and place. This categorisation of strategies did not stem from theoretical literature but arose from Gonzalez’s own engagement in them as a visual artist. The three categories chosen were seen as a good motivation to engage conference participants with prior expertise in analysing images but not necessarily in constructing them. The three strategies were aimed at creating a shared set of means of understanding the task by investigating placing and staging (*tableaux vivants*), the self’s image (self-portraiture) and the political dimension of the message (activism).

Tableaux vivants show “figures posed, silent, and immobile in imitation of well-known works of art or dramatic scenes from history and literature” (Chapman 24) and are generally performed live, but the practice was introduced here to help with the composition of the image, either as standalone creation or as one of the images of “Wozu Poesie?” taken as inspiration and re-staged. The time constraints of the workshop and the limited resources available meant that imaginative solutions to instant composition were required on this occasion. In addition, *tableaux vivants* encourage collaboration. This strategy was taken up by two of the participants working together on an image (Figure 2), which had echoes of the 1928 painting *The Lovers* by René Magritte.



Figure 2. “Wozu Image?”: *Images are instant memory*

Most of the images produced fell under the category of self-portraiture (see Cummings), a representation of the image-maker in relation to the text written on the placard and the background chosen. With this, we discussed in practical terms what it means to *put oneself in the picture* (Lacan), a ubiquitous strategy in social media’s selfie culture but with a deeper self-reflexive dimension. A further strategy introduced was activism, as defined above, and employed to show the potential images have to instigate change. The question posed (“What’s the point of images?”), the discussion around “Wozu Poesie?” and the use of visual imagery associated with protest (the cardboard for the placards, the hand-written text) resembled methods employed by other activist works (see for example the works of the Spanish performance group *No Somos Delito*, as well as La Ribot). It was clear from the outset, however, both in the preparation of the workshop and the understanding of the participants, that a fully activist outcome would require them to build a more sustained engagement with the ideas and materials presented than the short interval allocated to the present workshop allowed. What was encouraged, however, as part of the workshop process, was to treat the activist component of “Wozu Poesie?” as an “essentially *readable*” cultural artefact (Segal 3, emphasis in original).



Figure 3. Second stage: writing the sign

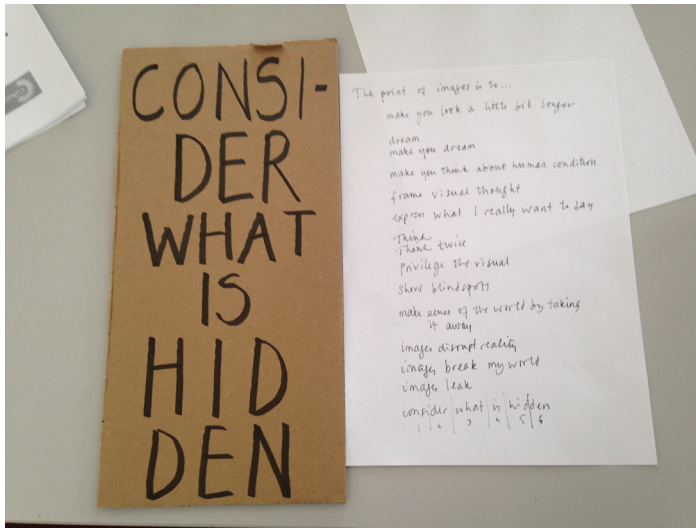


Figure 4. First and second stages side by side

The second stage, after the participants had written a set of statements, was to choose the base material on which to write (paper, cardboard, plastic, tape), its size and colour, the writing implements (pens, pencils, markers, crayons, colours), and, finally, designing the shape, colour and size of the words. Here the responses were diverse, some choosing cardboard (see Figures 3 and 4) and some preferring digital means (see Figure 5). The next step was to select the background of the image and the placement of the body, the placard, the red item and the camera. The red item, a constant in the “Wozu Poesie?” images, had various functions: it concealed the identity of the poet when this was necessary due to the political situation in the country where the image was taken; it unified the images, making all of them belong, a constant among all participants; and it focused the gaze, with its vivid colour. To that, it can also be added, of course, political associations of red with the left and revolution. Lastly, the photograph was taken.



Figure 5. Second and final stages: writing the sign digitally/taking the photograph

Composition was a key theme in the workshop: from the composition of the text (the answer to the question, in Figure 2: *Images are instant memory*) to the composition of the words as an image (in Figure 2, the handwritten sign, on the cardboard, with green marker, and spaced as seen) and the photograph containing the words as image (Figures 2, 5, 6). Edges, boundaries, centres, textures, colours, angles, legibility, transmission and textual content were constantly being considered in action.

By following these simple steps (writing, designing the placard, composing the image) and restrictions (using something red, limiting the words on the placard, binding time, employing the media of text and photographic image) the participants were able to understand and translate “Wozu Poesie?” in an embodied way, setting themselves the challenge that the makers of the original images had faced and, thus, exploring the themes from within, which is the inverse of starting from the surface level of source images and seeking equivalence to the viewed artefact. As one participant commented, the workshop allowed her to “Set the words free” (Figure 6).



Figure 6. “Wozu Image?”: *Set the words free*

What’s the Point of Images?

At the “(e)motion” conference, keynote speaker Willie van Peer introduced the work of Viktor Shklovsky. The work he discussed, “Art and Technique,” provides an appropriate context in which to examine the purpose of the “Wozu Image?” workshop:

And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *story*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important.* (Shklovsky 778, present authors’ emphasis)

“Wozu Image?” provided an embodied way of “experiencing the artfulness” of “Wozu Poesie?” as it was perceived and not as it could be known. The workshop provided some personal answers to the question “What’s the point of images?” These were then added to the display of “Wozu Poesie?” in Warsaw, completing the circle initiated at the outset of the workshop. The texts and images produced are, of course, not conclusive or scientific answers to the question posed. Yet, they provided an embodied, rather than intellectual, way of exploring the themes, an insight into the decision-making processes of constructing text, visual text and image, a consideration of what it means to put oneself in the picture and, therefore, to take responsibility for the artefact and its public display.

Both “Wozu Poesie?” and “Wozu Image?” physically embody the act of mimesis, an ephemeral act of self-construction captured in a moment of “phenomenal immobility”: the artist inserts herself behind the flat surface of the photograph, rendering the subject and the background seamless, but for the viewer’s recourse to meaning-making from the words and images she, in turn, perceives through her senses (Baudrillard 134). We held up a mirror to “Wozu Poesie?” for two reasons: in the sense of asking the reverse question “What’s the point of images?” and in the sense of mimesis where artist/writer/photographer adopts the activist stance of “Wozu Poesie?” by inserting oneself in the picture. In this way, and through the friction apparent in the specific “imagetext” creations (Mitchell 89), we aim to “make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception” (Shklovsky 778) for the viewer/reader, inviting them to take a consciously reflexive stance when they next take a self-portrait or write a slogan.

Wozu Image? Workshop Handout
CLE Intersemiotic SIG, Warsaw 11 May 2017
Madeleine Campbell and Laura González

An exploration of the relation between image and text, “that infinite space where the gaze is returned to the gaze and the hand to the quill.” (Jabès 1975)

Prompts and stories: Gertrude Stein’s ‘rose’

Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose
Loveliness extreme.
Extra gaiters,
Loveliness extreme.
Sweetest ice-cream.
Pages ages page ages page ages.

From the poem ‘Sacred Emily’ (1913, published 1922)

He knew that. Roses. Are. Red. And. Roses. Are. White. And
Roses. Are. Rose. Colored.

From the poem ‘Winning His Way’ (1931, published 1956)

Aphorisms: Jabès and Magritte

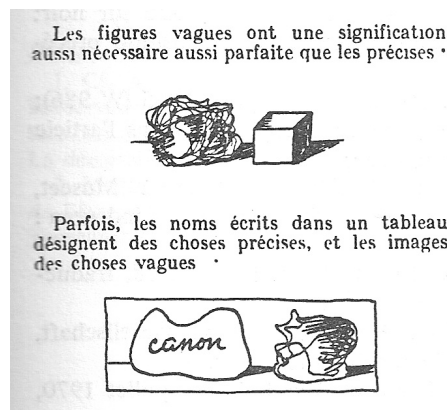
An image is created through the words that dream it.

We will gather images and images of images up till the last, which is blank.
This one we will agree on. (Reb Carasso)

(Jabès 1991, Transl. Rosemarie Waldrop)

An image can take the place of a word in a proposition
An object makes one suppose that there are other objects behind it...
In a painting, words have the same substance as images.
One sees images and words differently in a painting...
An object never fills the same space as its name or its image.
At first, the visible edges of objects, in reality, touch as if they form a mosaic.
Vague images have a meaning as necessary and perfect as precise images.

(Magritte 1979, Transl. Stockwell 2003)



(Magritte 1979)

... words that dream images

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

(Pound 1913)

Haikus

Callan las cuerdas.
La música sabía
Lo que yo siento.

(Borges 1981)

The strings are silent.
The music knew
What I was feeling.

(Transl. Stephen Fry 2015)

Figure 7. Workshop Handout

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